EPISTLE

TO

A FRIEND,

ON THE DEATH OF

JOHN THORNTON, Esq.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"AN EPISTLE TO AN EMINENT PAINTER."

CUJUS EGO INTERITU TOTA DE MENTE FUGAVI
HÆC STUDIA, ATQUE OMNES DELICIAS ANIMI.

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CATULLUS.

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PRINTED for J. DODSLEY, in PALL-MALL.

M.DCC.LXXX.

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EPISTLE, &c.

IN vain, dear Monitor, thy kind desire
To wake the embers of poetic fire!
To clear the mind, where Grief's dark shadows lower,
And Fancy dies by Sorrow's freezing power!
In vain would Friendship's chearing voice suggest
Her flattering visions to the Poet's breast;
That public favor calls, with just demand,
Th' expected volume from his lingering hand:
Lost are those anxious hopes, that eager pride,
With thee, my THORNTON, they declin'd, they died.

Friend of my opening ſoul! whoſe love began

To hail thy Poet, ere he rank'd as man!

Whoſe praiſe, like dew-drops, which the early morn

Sheds with mild virtue on the vernal thorn,

Taught his young mind each ſwell of thought to ſhew,

And gave the germs of fancy ſtrength to blow!

Dear, firm aſſociate of his ſtudious hour,

Who led his idler ſtep to Learning's bower!

Tho' young, imparting to his giddier youth

Thy thirſt of ſcience, and thy zeal for truth!

Ye towers of Granta, where our friendſhip grew,

And that pure mind expanded to my view,

Our love fraternal let thy walls atteſt,

Where Attic joys our letter'd evening bleſt;

Where midnight, from the chains of ſleep reliev'd,

Stole on our ſocial ſtudies unperceiv'd!

But not, my THORNTON! in that calm alone
Was thy mild genius, thy warm virtue known:
When manhood mark'd the hour for buſy ſtrife,
And led us to the crowded maze of life,
From whence to ſweet retirement's ſoothing ſhade,
Love and the Muſe thy willing friend convey'd;
Thy ſoul, more firm to join the ſtruggling crowd,
To nobler Themis toilſome homage vow'd,
With zeal, devoting to her ſacred throne
A heart as uncorrupted as her own.
Still as thy mind, with manly powers endued,
The opening path of active life purſued,
And round the ripening field of buſineſs rang'd,
Thy heart, unwarp'd, unharden'd, uneſtrang'd,
To early friendſhip ſtill retain'd its truth,
With all the warm integrity of youth.

Whene'er affliction's force thy friend oppreſt,
Thou wer't the rock on which his cares might reſt;
From thy kind words his riſing hopes would own
The charm of reaſon in affection's tone.
Where is the ſoothing voice of equal power,
To take it's anguiſh from the preſent hour?
Beneath the preſſure of a grief ſo juſt,
The lenient aid of books in vain I truſt:
They, that could once the war of thought controul,
And baniſh diſcord from the jarring ſoul,
Now irritate the mind, they uſed to heal,
They ſpeak too loudly of the loſs I feel.
Thou faithful cenſor of the Poet's ſtrain,
No more ſhalt thou his ſinking hope ſuſtain,
No more, with ardent zeal's enlivening fire,
Call from inglorious ſhades his ſilent lyre:

No more, as in our days of pleaſure paſt,
The eye of judgment o'er his labors caſt;
Keen to diſcern the blemiſhes, that lurk
In the looſe texture of his growing work;
Eager to praiſe, yet reſolute to blame,
Kind to his verſe, but kinder to his fame.
How may the Muſe, who proſper'd by thy care,
Now meet the public eye without deſpair?
Now, if harſh cenſures on her failings pour,
Her warmeſt advocate can ſpeak no more:
Cold are thoſe lips, which breath'd the kind defence,
If ſpleen's proud cavil ſtrain'd her tortur'd ſenſe;
Which bade her ſong to public praiſe aſpire,
And call'd attention to her trembling lyre.
Ah! could ſhe now, thus petrified with grief,
Find in ſome lighter lay a vain relief,

Still muſt ſhe deem ſuch verſe, if ſuch could be,
A wound to friendſhip, and a crime to thee;
Profanely utter'd at this ſacred time,
When thy pale corſe demands her plaintive rhime,
And Virtue, weeping whom ſhe could not ſave,
Calls the juſt mourner to thy recent grave.

Hail hallow'd vault! whoſe darkſome caverns hold
A frame, though mortal, of no common mould;
A heart ſcarce ſullied with a human flaw,
Which ſhun'd no duty, and tranſgreſs'd no law;
In joy ſtill guarded, in diſtreſs ſerene,
Thro' life a model of the golden mean,
Which friendſhip only led him to tranſgreſs,
Whoſe purer ſpirit ſanctifies exceſs.

Pure mind! whoſe meekneſs, in thy mortal days,
Purſuing virtue, ſtill retir'd from praiſe;

Nor

Nor wiſh'd that friendſhip ſhould on marble give
That perfect image of thy worth to live,
Which 'twas thy aim alone to leave impreſt
On the cloſe tablet of her faithful breaſt.
If now her verſe againſt thy wiſh rebel,
And ſtrive to blazon, what ſhe lov'd ſo well,
Forgive the tender thought, the moral ſong,
Which would thy virtues to the world prolong;
That, reſcued from the grave's oblivious ſhade,
Their uſeful luſtre may be ſtill ſurvey'd,
Dear to the penſive eye of fond regret,
As light ſtill beaming from a ſun that's ſet.
Oft to our giddy Muſe thy voice has taught
The juſt ambition of poetic thought;
Bid her bold view to lateſt time extend,
And ſtrive to make futurity her friend.

If

If any verſe, her little art can frame,
May win the partial voice of diſtant fame,
Be it the verſe, whoſe fond ambition tries
To paint thy mind in truth's unfading dyes,
Tho' firm, yet tender, ardent, yet refin'd;
With Roman ſtrength and Attic grace combin'd.

What tho' undeck'd with titles, power, and wealth,
Great were thy generous deeds, and done by ſtealth;
For thy pure bounty from obſervance ſtole,
Nor wiſh'd applauſe, but from thy conſcious ſoul.
Tho' thy plain tomb no ſculptur'd form may ſhew,
No boaſtful witneſs of ſuſpected woe;
Yet heavenly ſhapes, that ſhun the glare of day,
To that dear ſpot ſhall nightly viſits pay:
Pale Science there ſhall o'er her votary ſtrew
Her flow'rs, yet moiſt with ſorrow's recent dew.

There

There Charity, Compaſſion's lovely child,
In ruſtic notes pathetically wild,
With grateful bleſſings bid thy name endure,
And mourn the patron of her village-poor.
E'en from the midnight ſhew with muſic gay,
The ſoul of Beauty to thy tomb ſhall ſtray,
In ſweet diſtraction ſteal from preſent mirth,
To ſigh unnotic'd o'er the hallow'd earth,
Which hides thoſe lips, that glow'd with tender fire,
And ſung her praiſes to no common lyre:
But Friendſhip, wrapt in ſorrow's deepeſt gloom,
Shall keep the longeſt vigils at thy tomb;
Her wounded breaſt, diſdainful of relief,
There claims a fond præeminence in grief.

Short was thy life, but ah! its thread how fine!
How pure the texture of the finiſh'd line!

What tho' thy opening manhood could not gain
Thoſe late rewards, maturer toils attain;
Hope's firmeſt promiſes 'twas thine to raiſe,
That merit's brighteſt meed would grace thy lengthen'd days;
For thine were Judgment's patient powers, to draw
Entangled juſtice from the nets of law;
Thine firm Integrity, whoſe language clear
Ne'er ſwell'd with arrogance, or ſhook with fear.
Reaſon's mild power, unvex'd by mental ſtrife,
Sway'd the calm current of thy uſeful life;
Whoſe even courſe was in no ſeaſon loſt,
Nor rough with ſtorms, nor ſtagnated by froſt.
In ſcenes of public toil, or ſocial eaſe,
'Twas thine by firm ſincerity to pleaſe;
Sweet as the breath of ſpring thy converſe flow'd,
As ſummer's noon-tide warmth thy friendſhip glow'd.

O'er

O'er thy mild manners, by no art conſtrain'd,
A penſive, pleaſing melancholy reign'd,
Which won regard, and charm'd th' attentive eye,
Like the ſoft luſtre of an evening ſky:
Yet if perchance excited to defend
The injur'd merit of an abſent friend,
That gentle ſpirit, rous'd to virtuous ire,
Indignant flaſh'd reſentment's noble fire.

Tho' juſt obſervance in thy life may trace
A lovely model of each moral grace,
Thy laſt of days the nobleſt leſſon taught:
Severe inſtruction! and too dearly bought!
Whoſe force from memory never can depart,
But while it mends, muſt agonize the heart.
Tho' thy ſhrunk nerves were deſtin'd to ſuſtain
Th' increaſing horrors of ſlow-waſting pain;

Thoſe ſpirit-quenching pangs, whoſe baſe controul
Cloud the clear temper, and exhauſt the ſoul;
Yet in that hour, when Death aſſerts his claim,
And his ſtrong ſummons ſhakes the conſcious frame;
When weaker minds, by frantic fear o'erthrown,
Shrink in wild horror from the dread Unknown,
Thy firmer ſoul, with Chriſtian ſtrength renew'd,
Nor loſt in languor, nor by pain ſubdued,
(While thy cold graſp the hand of Friendſhip preſt,
And her vain aid in fault'ring accents bleſt)
With awe, but not as Superſtition's ſlave,
Survey'd the gathering ſhadows of the grave;
And to thy God, in death, devoutly paid
That calm obedience which thy life diſplay'd.
Thou friend! yet left me of the choicer few,
Whom grief's fond eyes with growing love review;

O thou!

O thou! whom mutual ſorrow will incline
To mix thy ſympathetic ſighs with mine;
Still be it ours to pay, with juſt regret,
At Friendſhip's ſacred ſhrine our common debt!
Tho' doom'd (ſo Heaven ordains) to ſee no more
The gentle Being, whom we both deplore;
Painting ſhall ſtill, ſweet ſoothing art! ſupply
A form ſo precious in affection's eye.

Ah! little thought we, in that happier hour,
When our gay Muſe rehears'd the Pencil's power;
To mourn that form in cold obſtruction laid,
And ſee him only by the pencil's aid!
Bleſt be that pencil, every art be bleſt,
That ſtamps his image deeper on our breaſt!

Oft let us loiter on his favourite hill,
Whoſe ſhades the ſadly-pleaſing thought inſtill;

Recount his kindneſs, as we fondly rove,
And meet his ſpirit in the lonely grove.
At evening's penſive hour, or opening day,
He yet ſhall ſeem the partner of our way.
Bleſt Spirit! ſtill thro' fancy's ear impart
The calm of virtue to the troubled heart!
Correct each ſordid view, each vain deſire,
And touch the mortal, with celeſtial fire!
So may we ſtill, in this dark ſcene of earth,
Hold ſweet communion with thy living worth;
And, while our purer thoughts thy merit ſcan,
Revere the Angel, as we lov'd the Man.

FINIS.